

We see Jesus' loved ones staging a failed intervention, *They went out to seize him, for they were saying, 'He is out of his mind'* (3:21). And, one verse later, the religious establishment asserts, *He is possessed by Beelzebul* (3:22). While we have the benefit of faith and perspective to understand that Jesus is not crazy, but is, in fact, God-made-flesh, we must admit that their speculation isn't entirely off the rails. What else must brothers and sisters who for 30 years have known a normal Jesus, assume? What other conclusion could the scholarly religious authorities come to? Sane and non-possessed people don't turn their lives into a spiritual freak show. They don't make claims to deity and publicly discuss demons. That's not normal. Not then and not now.

But sometimes insanity and genius look a lot alike, don't they? Such is the case with Jesus. It's not that he's mad. No, it's just that his world (his kingdom) and he as its leader, are so otherworldly, that it surprises us and shakes our foundations. Humanity had never seen such power on public display. It had never heard such values being taught. It had never witnessed such dynamic, charismatic and divine authority wrapped in so much weakness. Jesus was a homeless, self-made rabbi from Nazareth, with *no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him* (Isaiah 53:2). We would have called him mad, too.

Jesus, for his part, does not seem overly bothered by the accusations of insanity. Instead, Jesus takes the response of those concerned and uses it to illustrate a dividing line between saving faith and damning disbelief. Those who will be forgiven are those who can see that behind the jaw-dropping miracles and alarming message is the very Spirit of God (4:28-29).

It's worth remembering is that the kingdom of God, the work of the Spirit, when on the move, will always disrupt and disturb a "sane" world. If "insanity" is persistently violating social norms with little regard for oneself, then the work of Jesus fits the description. The world idolizes logic and reason. God's people live by faith, and they love mystery. The world abuses the weak and attempts to fix the poor. God's people embrace the lowly as the greatest among us. The world rewards the strongest and the most capable. God's people openly confess our struggles and repent of our sins. The world says, "You are entitled to hate those that hurt you." Yet, we love our enemies, and pray for our persecutors. The world is full of people scrambling to stock up as much earthly treasure as they can before they die. We seek to give it away in favor of treasure in heaven. The world's motto is "Love yourself and try not to hurt your neighbor." Our motto is, "Love your neighbor, and, in doing so, be willing to sacrifice yourself." The world sleeps in on Sundays and brunches before noon. We drag ourselves out of bed to drink bad coffee in the fellowship hall, and to sing praise to the Lord whom we can't see, but whom we believe is coming back.

So, if Christians are called crazy from time to time, well, as Jesus might have put it, "Welcome to my world" (see John 15:18).

Here's the deal: If God is real, then, by definition, God is above and beyond any and all cultures, perspectives or political views. No one tribe completely "gets" God. Therefore, in some way, as God breaks into our world through the Son, the Word and Spirit-filled people, God will, in some way, offend and jar the sensibilities of everyone at some time or another.

If the God we worship is not deeply disrupting and uncomfortably confronting some part of our lives, then the God we worship is likely one of our own creation, not the Creator of the universe.

Nowhere is this "insanity" illustrated more vividly than in the gospel itself. **The Incarnation** of Jesus doesn't make sense. Think about it. *For you know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich* (2 Cor. 8:9); *Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death - even death on a cross* (Philippians 2:5-8). God became human and died? For us? Why? It's madness.

The cross: *For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God* (1 Cor. 1:18). God in flesh, giving his life as a gift for a rebellious and evil humanity is crazy. It is pure foolishness.

Salvation: Every other religious system requires that the one being rescued do something: grow in certain knowledge or demonstrate certain obedience. But we are told that Christ died for us while we were still sinners, and made us alive when we were dead. We bring nothing to the table (see Eph. 2:8-10). Instead, God, by the Holy Spirit, brings us and feeds us an unrelenting course of undeserved mercy and grace. It runs counter to all that we celebrate in our world. It's not how careers are conquered, how championships are won or a heart is wooed. It is, to the human hearer, completely ludicrous. And yet it's true.

The Resurrection: 'Nuff said. And when, by faith, this ludicrous truth lays hold of you, it changes you. At least it should. Just look at the first-century church as described in the book of Acts. The world responded to the early believers with dumbfounded, wide-eyed wonder. "Look at them. They share their stuff. They celebrate in their struggles. They eat flesh and drink blood. We can't hate them...they're insane." Or look at church history: we find countless examples of people who confronted the culture and paid the ultimate price.

What if the church today embraced her insanity? What if, rather than worry about fitting in and being relevant, the church chose to bear hug her weirdness? Everybody has that one neighbor on

their block who just doesn't care what others think. Everyone has the neighbor who lets his freak flag fly. He puts out the gaudiest decorations for Christmas. He checks his mail in his boxer shorts. He sits in the driveway, with a smile on his face, drinking wine from a box and waving hello to all that pass by.

What if the church was that guy? What would the church look like? Would the church be less put-off when the homeless woman wanders in on a Sunday morning, giving her a seat of honor and affording her great dignity? Would the church encourage radical generosity among the people? You know, the kind of generosity that makes people talk about you behind your back. Would the church start ministries that do more than entertain the children and educate the adults, but that pursue the prostitutes and rescue the addicts with no regard for its own reputation? Would the church preach the frightening depths of God's demands upon humanity - for righteousness and purity - yet counter it with a jaw-dropping and offensive amount of grace afforded us in Christ?

Jesus' friends and family were wondering if he was crazy. But we must ask if we are crazy *enough*. The answer will undoubtedly be "no." Let us, then, be set free with the insane message of the gospel: "Christ has been crucified to cover our lack of insanity." Let us then go forth out the door with the reminder that we have been set free as agents of an upside down and insane world known as the kingdom of God.

Sure, some will take offense at the whole notion of being "crazy for Jesus." Let us take comfort with these parting thoughts: First, just because we're labeled as "weird" doesn't mean we actually are. Some of the world's greatest influencers were once thought nuts, like Mozart and Sir Isaac Newton. You're in good company.

Second, if by some chance we do come under fire for radically and faithfully following Jesus, we've got a great defense: Not guilty by reason of insanity. Give it a shot. Sometimes it works. Amen.

Prayer: God, we praise you, for in Jesus Christ you came to seek and to save the lost and those who are 'losers' in the eyes of the world. By your Word we are assured that to lose our life in Christ is to find it; to confess and give over the burden of our sin to Christ is to find peace and the promise of eternal life. Thanks be to you, O God. Amen.

Sources:

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By Reason of Insanity

Sunday, June 21, 2015

The Federated Church, Fergus Falls, MN

Mark 3:20-35

"Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, I ask that you find my client not guilty. Yes, my client had motive. It's established that his fingerprints are all over the crime scene. And there's no doubt that he pulled the trigger. But that doesn't mean he should be convicted. Why not? Because my client is absolutely, positively, 100% certifiably insane. He is totally nuts. I rest my case."

We've all seen this tactic used in some cheesy courtroom drama playing on television. Many of us remember the acquittal of President Reagan's would-be-assassin, John Hinckley Jr. It's the insanity defense. The basic theory behind the defense is this: *One who is insane lacks the "malice aforethought" or the intent required to perform a truly criminal act because the person is either incapable of discerning the difference between right and wrong, or incapable of restraint, even in the face of such knowledge.*

Actually, although the insanity defense gets a lot of publicity, it is relatively rare as a legal strategy. Yet it remains a popular and polarizing piece of legal lore. And why not? It raises some fascinating questions: Can someone be held accountable for doing something bad if his or her mind is clouded with insanity? And besides that, what is insanity anyway? Aren't we all just a little nuts? What's the threshold for insanity that suddenly makes one incapable of being found culpable? And what about subjectivity? One generation's "insanity" is another generation's eccentric. And then there's the issue of genius. Isn't it true that sometimes our most enlightened and creative people look, think and act in much the same manner as our most unstable ones?

Such questions come rushing to mind in the third chapter of Mark's gospel. Jesus' popularity is growing. He's performing miracles - like cleansing lepers, restoring withered hands and saying strange things like, "I am Lord of the Sabbath," "Your sins are forgiven" and "I give you authority to cast out people's demons."

Jesus was drawing an uncomfortable amount of attention to himself. So much so, that two groups - those who are closest to him and those most threatened by him - begin asking the same question: *Is this guy insane?*